

Title: God's Delight is your Delight
Text: Isaiah 58-59
Theme: God loves for his children to delight in him
Series: Isaiah #50
Prop Stmtnt: Empty religion is no substitute for the reality of Christ
Aim: To present to my people that our soul's delight is only in Christ

Read Text: Isaiah 58:1-4; 59.15b-21

Christ commanded his followers to observe the ordinance of communion that he initiated and instituted on the night before he died on the cross. He did not say how often we were supposed to do this, but that we were supposed to do this. There is evidence in Acts that in the early days of the church, they observed communion daily. In the church of Corinth it appears that they did it once a week. In both of those examples, it appears that the believers observed communion as part of a meal that they enjoyed together. Bread and wine was a regular part of their dinner, and Christ used those two elements to illustrate that his body (bread) and his blood (wine) was broken, pierced and poured out for them.

Have you ever wondered why he used bread and wine and the context of a meal? Obviously, the symbolism of the Passover meal was an enormous illustration. In fact, God used the rescue of Israel from Egypt by means of the death of an innocent, substitutionary lamb as a prophecy that pointed to Christ, who would come to die for us and deliver us from bondage to sin. But there is even more to this than that.

Christ established this ordinance as the means by which we are to remember Him! "Do this in remembrance of me." But, think about the means. Bread, wine, and a meal with family and friends all speak of something that we enjoy and delight in. Christ commanded his church to do something that they enjoy doing as the means by which he wants to be remembered. He did not call us to gather together and punish one another, or cause each other pain. He did not ask us to eat broccoli and drink cod liver oil. Some of you grew up giving something up for Lent. You had to give up a pleasure you were told, in order to please God. And yet Christ says, that he wants to be remembered by us eating together with others, which gives us pleasure. When Christ established the ordinance of communion it was to be viewed as the same kind of celebration, reunion, and family gathering that we have when we gather with our family and friends. Now, the way that we tend to do it, appears to be rather skimpy. We have these dinky little cups and a tasteless crumb that, if we are not careful, can be the occasion of missing the picture. And the picture is this. God delights in his children delighting in him. God gives glorious gifts to his children. God loves for his children to enjoy him and depend on him. God loves to satisfy his children with good things. That is what the cross is all about. God is satisfied with the death of Christ for us and God wants us to be satisfied with Christ because God knows that nothing else will satisfy us, nothing!

Now, this is opposite of what your heart will tell you. This is clearly opposite of what your world will tell you. This is opposite of bad religion. Bad religion is based on the idea that you are to sacrifice for God in order for God to be happy with you. The more

you sacrifice, the more you are rewarded. Let's do surgery on that for a second. When we open that up, the heart of this is the idea that I can get God to do what I want. I can get God to respond to my desires. I need forgiveness, so I sacrifice for God. I need a relationship, so I sacrifice for God. I need to pass this class, ace this exam, get my driver's license, get a promotion, get this job, get pregnant, win my fantasy football league, etc., so I go to church. And if I go to church on a communion Sunday, then it's like the Daily Double in Jeopardy – right? It's extra points! And we are all willing to put up with a little inconvenience, sacrifice, if, we are going to get something in return. So, what does religion do? It gives people ceremonies that will make them feel good about themselves. It tells them that the ceremonies are very important, mysterious even, and deeply meaningful. It gets them involved in volunteering, serving, helping out in order to give them a sense of fulfillment because they are doing something that is getting affirmation from religious people, which many interpret as God approving of it. Which is why this is SO dangerous.

Scenario #1

Lack of peace (hostility with God and others)= diagnosis: my circumstances need to change, or I need to feel better about myself (i.e. the problem is outside of me – if people treated me better, if I had a different spouse, etc) so... = I need to get God to do what I want = bad religion = temporary and/or elusive peace. I want relief. I want my conscience to be appeased, but I do not want to truly surrender. I know my problem; therefore, I can develop my own solution. I can do things to get God on my side. (Works-righteousness). Remember that the goal is relief, and I am going to do anything that I have to in order to get relief. Contrast that with:

Scenario #2

Lack of peace = Awareness of my sin (humble, broken) = repentance and faith (conversion) = justification (declared righteous and at peace with God) = sanctification (growing as a follower of Christ). I need God. I do not know how serious my problem is. I need God to reveal it to me. I cannot develop my own solution; I have to depend on God to do that for me.

The vast majority of people take the 1st path. The vast majority of people in Isaiah's day were trying to take the 1st path. I call it the path of Bad Religion. In Bad Religion, I try to satisfy myself with what I can do to change my life. It does not work.

1. **Bad religion does not satisfy.** (58.1-14)

A. **It is not serious about sin** (1)

This is the lonely but necessary job of the prophet (or a true church). Tell people the truth about THEIR sins! It is often a thankless task. In fact, you are often viewed as the enemy instead of the friend. But, here God is saying to scream at the top of your lungs because sin is a serious issue.

Look at the last verse from chapter 57. God says that there is no peace for the wicked. Their lives are in misery because (v1) of the sin in their lives. If no one exposes the sin, then people will never know peace. Here is the choice that you have: Do you tell people the truth about their sin (if you are the speaker) and are you willing to listen to the truth about your sin (if you are the listener) or do you tell people what will make them feel better?

The self-help section of bookstores has become one of the largest. It is like the Home Depot section for life. (You can do it, we can help) One self-help writer wrote the following about how to deal with the issue of guilt. What is said are some pretty common assumptions about guilt. My guess is that this person is trying to help others deal with this because she knows that many people struggle with it. So, she has written: 7 Reasons Why You Feel Guilty:

- 1) You feel guilty when you're trying to avoid something.
- 2) Reacting to a situation instead of choosing your response.
- 3) Someone pushing your buttons.
- 4) Not forgiving yourself.
- 5) Conditioned Response
- 6) The World should be a certain way.
- 7) Anxiety and Fear

The writer is kind, but clueless. All she can address is the feeling of guilt. Now, connect the dots from what I said before about the two ways to approach issues, because this is a perfect example of it. A self-driven diagnosis of my problems will lead to a self-driven solution. She has nothing to say about the reality of guilt because she is not starting with God's view. All she can do is treat the symptoms, because she does not fully understand the cause. If you have a brain tumor that is giving you a headache, then taking an aspirin is not going to fix your problem. We are sinners. Sin makes us guilty. Guilt makes us feel guilty because we are guilty. Feeling guilty is a gracious gift from God that is designed to drive us to the cross where, and only where we can be forgiven, cleansed and set free. Everything else is aspirin and symptom-masking. But, since people do not want to hear the truth about their sin, they will settle for aspirin. But, aspirin will not cure a brain tumor. I expect this from people in this world who are doing what they can to attempt to help others. It is when people, in the name of God, or religion give this sort of advice, like you hear from Joel Osteen. (America's pastor – which is very fitting. We are the nation that can do it ourselves, so many are naturally attracted to someone who, like a life coach gives some advice and positive encouragement. What glares at us is the fact that people do not take sin seriously, like God does. In order to understand and experience the grace of God, you have to understand and own the true nature of your rebellion. Sin has turned us completely inside out. We have to come to grips with that. Bad Religion is complicit in the cover-up because...

B. It settles for ceremony without reality (2-5)

These verses describe the person who appears to be very religious and he is. He is devoted to his own efforts to appear righteous. And he is attempting to do religious things to accomplish it. For example, one of the things that the guy is doing is fasting. (3) He is complaining that he is giving up all of this food in order to get God to go along with his desires and God is not cooperating. And he is frustrated with it. He sees religion as a spiritual version of “Let’s Make a Deal.” He is willing to do things that make him appear to be devout and spiritual, but, doing religious things does not make you devout and spiritual. Doing religious deeds and making sacrifices will not change your heart. Bad Religion will try to sell you ceremony because it has no answers for the reality of your soul’s condition. If in your fasting, you are angry because you do not get your way (4), do you really think this is what God wants?

I had a lady repeatedly brag to me how she spent two hours a day studying the Bible and that she had never met anyone else like herself. (Thank God, one was more than enough) I could not tell her a thing; because she studied the Bible for two hours a day. No one could tell her a thing, because she studied the Bible for two hours a day. I began to realize that her savior, her righteousness, her hope, her identity, her salvation was her studying the Bible two hours a day. She missed the point! Bad Religion misses the point. Look at the end of v.5. God is gagging on fasts like that!

C. It misses the whole point. (6-14)

The true gospel changes ones relationship with God, which affects the relationship one has with other people. If my relationship with people is stingy, self-righteous, unforgiving and arrogant, then something is seriously out of order with my relationship with God.

From time to time you will hear about someone who pretends to be homeless so he can identify with those who really are. Or, you hear about people fasting for hunger. That is, they go without food so they know what it is like to be hungry. If you do those sorts of things, people may admire you for it. But, seriously what are you doing? If you really care about the hungry, then instead of wasting your time on a fast or dressing up like you are homeless, go do something for the needy. The needy do not need you pretending to be needy; they need someone who cares for them. They don’t need someone who cares that others perceive them as caring; they need someone who really cares. How many times have we seen “acts of compassion” as nothing more than photo ops? That is point that God is making here. When you really get what the gospel is all about, then you do not care about getting your way, getting your points, getting your attention and credit. You care about God and you care about those whom God cares about – that’s it!

2. Bad Religion produces an empty and desperate existence. (59.1-15a)

A. Bad Religion cannot change the heart (1-8)

a. Lonely (1-2)

What is going on here? These people are asking, “Why isn’t God answering my prayers?” The problem was that they did not have a proper view of God. In their minds, God existed to help them get what they wanted. But, if we got what we wanted, it would destroy us. “*You ask and do not receive because you ask that you may spend it on your passions.*” (James 4.3) God is not going to answer your prayer for bullets so that you can load a gun and shoot yourself. So, here the person is feeling lonely and abandoned by God because God won’t give him what he wants. What is the problem here? It is not God. It is the fact that you refuse to let go of your sin! You are separated from God because of your sin and you are blaming God for your misery!

b. Guilty (3)

Look at what you do. Listen to your own words, and to the things that you mutter under your breath. You cannot expect God to pretend that He is okay with this. You need to admit that you are not in a position to negotiate with God. You cannot bend his will to benefit you.

c. Deceitful (4)

This verse speaks of those who attempt to use the technicalities of the law as an opportunity to do wrong. The end goal justifies whatever means you have to take in order to get there. We call that “situational ethics.” What is described here is a society that does not look at the court system as the means by which law and justice are enforced, but they look at the legal system as a tool to get power by the clever manipulating of the law to their own ends. It is not what you know, it is who you know. But, at what cost? Every time you trade away your integrity for a piece of influence, you become less human, and more hollow. At some point, you will not even know what you believe about anything.

d. Cycle of consequences (5-8)

When a society tries to exist on deceit, it becomes trapped in a web of destruction. This society is producing serpent eggs and spider-webs. Some of you know that the poison in a baby snake (asp) is as potent as an adult snake. A spider-web may look impressive, but if you cut one major strand, the whole thing collapses. All of this is describing a people who only live for themselves. All restraint is gone, and they will stop at nothing to get their own way. It all starts with a failure to understand the seriousness of sin. Aspirin will not cure a brain tumor.

B. Bad Religion cannot give true hope (9-15a)

Something happens between verses 8 and 9. In verse 8, Isaiah refers to “they”. In v.9 he speaks of “us”. And while I think that Isaiah is pointing out the failures of people on so many levels, he is not the stereotypical prophet who is pointing a bony finger at all of the bad people out there. He is identifying himself with sinners. There is deep humility evidenced here. Isaiah is crying out for himself and for his people. He has no right to claim an exemption from God’s righteous judgment. He is confessing honesty with his

own sin. He is acknowledging that he cannot live the righteous life that he needs to and that he is not strong enough to pull it off. He is grieved over the lack of justice, the reality that people have no idea which way to turn, they have no direction, they groan, they grieve, and they just multiply their sin. He sees the result of people who have a form of religion, but it is not really based on truth. In the end, it does not help and the people have no true anchor. Isaiah is in the middle of this. He sees it. *“truth has stumbled in the public squares and uprightness cannot enter.”* (14) He knows that his people have a proud religious heritage, but their heritage of traditions and rules are powerless against the evil that is in the human heart.

Bad religion gives you discipline, structure and good intentions. But keeping rules about personal habits will never change your heart. True change starts in the heart.

3. **So, God sent a Redeemer!** (59.15b-21)

God saw the evidence of our sin (15b), and God knew the hopelessness of our condition (16a). So, God sent us a redeemer (16b). But notice that this salvation is provided for those “who turn from transgression.”

Why does God go through with all of this? You were designed as a human being, to reflect God. You were made in his image. Your template is based on aspects of God’s being. You function with wholeness and satisfaction, when you live in enjoyment of God. How can you enjoy God? Isn’t God angry with you? Don’t you have to work relentlessly in order seek God’s elusive approval? No. It would be impossible. God saw (16) “that there was no man.” He sent a Redeemer. Christ died for you. He paid for your sin in full. There is nothing left for you to pay. There is nothing left for you to prove. There is nothing else for you achieve. Receive him! Enjoy him! God delights in your delight. Nothing else will satisfy because no one loves you as he does.

- 1) Beware of Bad Religion (the seeds of it are in our hearts)
- 2) Use the gospel to fight your tendency to believe bad religion.
- 3) Preach the gospel to yourself daily:
 - a. God is not satisfied with your efforts – ever
 - b. God IS satisfied with Christ.
 - c. God IS delighted with Christ.
 - d. Being in Christ means that God delights in you because He delights in His Son. Christ, and only Christ is your full, final and eternal cause of God’s eternal delight in you.